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SKILL WITH WHIPS AND KNIVES WINS BATTLE FOR V CORPS SOLDIERS – BATTLE OF THE KITCHEN, THAT IS

By 1st Lt. Heather Kennedy
701st Main Support Battalion, 1st Infantry Division

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, TIKRIT, Iraq -- The competition was fierce, and there were knives involved.

There were also spatulas, spoons, measuring cups and more, when two cooks from the 701st Main Support Battalion of V Corps' 1st Infantry Division units here whipped up winning recipes in a culinary arts competition here designed to showcase the skill and creativity of Army cooks in Iraq.

The competition had three parts, each testing different aspects of each cooks' skills.

The first was a centerpiece creation. Each cook was given a fruit or a vegetable, such as a watermelon, red pepper, apple, tomato or cantaloupe, to carve into a decorative centerpiece.

The second part was "Chef Jeopardy," a game testing each contestant's mental agility.

The final portion of the competition was a sandwich competition that challenged competitors to create a hot sandwich with any ingredients they chose.

Cooks Sgt. Jeffrey Adams and Spc. Danny Petretti of the 701st did the battalion proud in the competition. Adams, an Army cook for more than 13 years, has been with the battalion's Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment since February 2002. Petretti has been a cook for three years and assigned to HHD since October 2002.

While the cooks say melding flavors to create delectable treats is an important aspect of their trade, presentation is a fundamental skill as well. For the centerpiece competition, Adams created a flying dragon, while Petretti created a Viking Ship with the 1st Infantry Division's "Big Red One" carved into the mast.

In the sandwich competition Adams' presented a "wonder sandwich", a meat lover's feast with chicken, turkey and ham on toasted French bread, with a sprinkling of olive oil, topped off with Swiss cheese and an Italian butter with garlic, oregano and thyme. To pay homage to his Italian roots, Petretti offered a variation of the "French dip" on an Italian-seasoned baguette, using rare prime rib seared in its own juices topped with cheddar cheese and fire-roasted red pepper and an au jus with rosemary and thyme at its side. He named his creation "The Italian Connection."

Skill in the kitchen is not limited to ability to cook and present a meal, the cooks add -- it is also a science. Ingredients in specific quantities, cooked at correct temperatures for just the right time, create a dish.

When the judging was complete, Adams and Petretti proved they had the art of that science down. Petretti's "Italian Connection" and Viking ship took first prize in the lower enlisted cooks' categories, while Adams entries earned him runner-up honors in the NCO categories.

